



# Research Brief

## School-wide Behavior Programs

FAPE-22

Recent changes to the Federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), stress that students with disabilities have the right to participate to the maximum extent appropriate in regular education classes with non-disabled students. This is one important way that students with disabilities can learn the skills they need to live, work, and make friends with others who do not have disabilities. However, problem behaviors pose a great threat to successful inclusion for these students. The U.S. Department of Education reports that students with problem behaviors are among the least likely to be educated in regular classrooms compared to students with other disabilities.<sup>(1)</sup>

In the past, the response to problem behaviors has generally been to punish and exclude students. Some school districts adopted a “zero tolerance” policy which punishes students for any school disruption – no matter how minor. However, results of over 500 studies show that punishment is one of the least effective responses to problem behaviors.<sup>(2)</sup> School-wide policies that punish students for negative behaviors but that don’t reward positive behaviors actually increased aggression, vandalism, truancy, tardiness, and dropping out of school.<sup>(2)</sup>

These same studies show that the best way to reduce problem behaviors of students is to use positive behavioral interventions, to teach social skills, and to change the student’s curriculum or schedule.<sup>(3)</sup> However, research also shows that positive behavioral interventions are more effective if they are used not only for individual students but on a school-wide level as well. Adopting a school-wide behavior program has two additional benefits. First, kids who are not labeled as disabled, but who display problem

behaviors, learn the skills they need to reduce these behaviors. Second, by adopting a school-wide code of conduct, the number of places where kids with disabilities can be successfully included increases. They can succeed not only in the classroom but also in the halls, the cafeteria, on the playground, on school buses, and at after-school activities.<sup>(4)</sup>

Over the past ten years, various school-wide behavior programs have been tried in schools across the country. The initial findings have been very promising – even for students with significant emotional disabilities. One New Hampshire school has been using a school-wide behavior program for the past four years. It has worked so well that 80% of all kids with significant emotional disabilities are included in the regular classroom for most of the day and 90% are included at least part of the day.

Schools that are successfully using school-wide behavior programs generally have things in common such as the following:

- there are consistent rules of behavior for everyone in the school
- there are consistent and fair consequences for breaking the rules
- there is total staff commitment; everyone agrees to work together
- students are taught self-control or social skills just like they are taught academic skills
- there is an additional plan in place for students with problem behaviors
- the program works to prevent as well as respond to problem behaviors
- behavioral interventions are based on current research



- the program is committed to serving all children
- parents and other community members are involved in the process
- regular and special education staffs work together as a team
- regular and special education staffs receive ongoing training
- school personnel have high academic expectations for all students

How do you know if your school could benefit from a school-wide behavior program? Researchers George Sugai, Edward Kameenui, and Geoff Calvin recommend that school personnel consider a school-wide program if they have the following concerns: <sup>(5)</sup>

1. academic and social goals are not being met
2. there are high rates of problem behaviors which lead to loss of academic time
3. problem behaviors are not handled consistently at a school level
4. families and the community are dissatisfied with the school's response to problem behaviors
5. teachers express dissatisfaction with the school's current behavior policy

There are numerous universities and agencies around the country that have been studying schools that use school-wide behavior programs. For more information contact the following:

**The Beach Center on Families and Disability**  
Haworth Hall, Room 3136  
1200 Sunnyside Ave.  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
Voice (913) 864-8600  
[www.beachcenter.org](http://www.beachcenter.org)

**National Council on Disabilities**

1331 F Street NW, Suite 1050  
Washington, DC 20004-11-7  
Voice (202) 272-2004  
TTY (202) 272-2074  
Email: [mquigley@ncd.gov](mailto:mquigley@ncd.gov)  
<http://www.ncd.gov>

**Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice**

American Institutes for Research  
1000 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20007  
1-888-457-1551  
Email: [Center@air-dc.org](mailto:Center@air-dc.org)  
<http://www.air.org/cecp>

**Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

1761 Alder Street  
1235 College of Education  
Eugene, OR 97403  
Voice (541) 346-2505  
E-mail: [pbis@oregon.uoregon.edu](mailto:pbis@oregon.uoregon.edu)  
[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

**National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities**

Academy for Educational Development  
P.O. Box 1492  
Washington, DC 20013-1492  
Toll-free 1-800-695-0285  
<http://nichcy.org>

**FAPE**

**PACER Center**

8161 Normandale Boulevard  
Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044  
Voice (952) 838-9000  
TTY (952) 838-0190  
Email: [fape@pacer.org](mailto:fape@pacer.org)  
<http://www.fape.org>

**George Sugai  
Specialized Training Program**

1235 University of Oregon  
Eugene, OR 97403-1235  
Voice (541) 346-5311  
TDD (541) 346-2466

**Office of Special Education Programs**

**U.S. Department of Education**

Mary Switzer Building

330 C St. NW

Washington, DC 20202

Toll-free 1-800-872-5327

*<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP//index.html>*

**Other Web sites of interest:**

**The Kentucky Department of Education's Behavior Home Page**

*<http://www.des.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/ebs1.html>*

**Behavioral Research and Teaching**

University of Oregon

College of Education

*<http://brt.uoregon.edu>*

**Council for Exceptional Children**

<http://www.cec.sped.org/index.html>

**Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)**

<http://ericec.org>

**References**

1. Positive Behavioral Support by Robert H. Horner with Jeffrey R. Sprague and George Sugai, Beach Center on Families and Disability from a 1992 U.S. Department of Education Report to Congress on the Implementation of P.L. 94-142.
2. Overview of Effective Behavioral Support: School-based Responses to Antisocial Behavior by the Kentucky Department of Education and the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation from their Web site *<http://www.des.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/ebs1.html>*
3. Ibid
4. Emerging Models, The Council for Exceptional Children from Research Connections Fall 1997
5. School-wide Applications of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support from their Web site *<http://www.pbis.org/english/index.html>*

Funding for the FAPE Project comes from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Cooperative Agreement No. H326A980004). This document was reviewed by the U. S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the OSEP Project Office, and the FAPE Project Director for consistency with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of other organizations imply endorsement by those organizations or the U.S. Government.